

# Strategic plan

**2025**



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## Foreword

For the past two decades, the Sahara Conservation Fund — now, in this 2025 strategic plan, formally re-branded as Sahara Conservation — has worked to champion the unique wildlife of the world's greatest desert landscape. We have worked to protect the last remnant populations of Critically Endangered species including the addax and the starkly patterned dama gazelle, and in more recent years pivoted to large-scale rewilding through translocations and reintroductions. Today, over 500 scimitar-horned oryx roam free across the grasslands of central Chad's Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve (OROAGR), after being extinct in the wild for nearly 30 years. Alongside them are addax (also reintroduced in Chad), dama gazelles, North African ostrich, and many thousands of dorcas gazelles. Sahara Conservation is also now working to secure the long-term management and conservation of this vast, critical landscape of OROAGR, as part of a wider surge of conservation momentum in Chad and the wider Sahel and Sahara region.

These achievements have all been based on a commitment to science, collaboration, and strong long-term partnerships, ranging from the governments of Chad, Niger, and Morocco; to scientific institutions, including the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the Zoological Society of London; to key strategic partners, such as the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi and the European Union.

Through partnerships, key investments, and platforms that continue to promote collaboration, greater visibility, and investment in this long-neglected region, Sahara Conservation believes that it has a key role to play in accelerating progress in these extraordinary landscapes. Now more than ever, the future of people and nature are interconnected, as healthy ecosystems are key to both human livelihoods and the future of wildlife. Sahara Conservation will continue to play a key role in providing the tools, knowledge, and field-level leadership to drive solutions on a growing scale. We invite all partners and colleagues to join us in this effort.

Roseline C. Beudels-Jamar  
and Fred Nelson,  
Chairs of the Board  
Sahara Conservation

# The Sahara and Sahel region

## Where Sahara Conservation works

The greater Sahel and Sahara region extends over 17 countries and is home to more than 300 million people of many different ethnic groups, including more than 20 million pastoralists. Some of the world's poorest countries are found in this region. In addition, instability is a recurring theme in the Sahel and West Africa for which the underlying dynamics have grown increasingly complex and problematic. Though extreme weather events are occurring elsewhere in the world, the Sahel is particularly

vulnerable to changes resulting from climate change. Rapid population growth compounds these problems, according to UN sources.

On some projections, the average daytime temperature in the Sahel is expected to rise by eight degrees by the end of the century. Traditional modes of agriculture are particularly vulnerable to shrinking resources, such as grazing and water.



*Sahel and Sahara region*





## Conservation in the Sahel and the Sahara

The Sahara is the largest desert in the world, covering an area of 10 million km<sup>2</sup>, approximately the size of the continental United States or China. This unique ecosystem is comprised of a mosaic of habitats with around 25 percent sand dunes; the rest is made up of rocky plateaus, gravel plains, mountains, and oases. The region is home to more than 2,000 plant species and over 150 mammal species, all uniquely adapted to extreme heat and drought.

The Sahara and the bordering Sahel grasslands have long been home to wildlife and to peoples whose livelihoods and survival are intrinsically linked to the sustainable use of natural resources – space, pasture, wild fruits, seeds, timber and water.

Unfortunately, during the last 50 years, over-hunting, over-grazing, shifting climatic conditions, and an absence of conservation resources have led to the degradation or loss of many habitats, and the decline or extinction of once-abundant species.

Especially hard hit has been the region's unique large antelopes and gazelles, such as scimitar-horned oryx (*Oryx dammah*), addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), dama gazelle (*Nanger dama*) and slender-horned gazelle (*Gazella leptoceros*), as well as West African cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*) that are considered

keystone desert species. Other wildlife has also suffered, including the smaller gazelles, bustards, vultures, West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*), North African ostrich (*Struthio camelus camelus*), spurred tortoise (*Centrochelys sulcata*), and many species of plants that are of use to people and wildlife alike.

These keystone species are essential for the maintenance of biodiversity, ecological processes, resilience in human populations, and productivity of desert ecosystems that provide benefits for people and wildlife alike.

For decades, the Sahara desert and bordering Sahelian grasslands have been an orphan in the conservation sector. Largely ignored by many international conservation organizations that focus on biodiversity hotspots and wilderness areas, the fate of the unique wildlife and wildlands of some of the most extreme and wildest areas on earth has been neglected.

The declining integrity of the natural desert ecosystems directly impacts human welfare, reducing environmental and social resilience to desertification and extreme weather events. It is anticipated that these events will become increasingly frequent, compounded by climate change in the next few decades.







# Sahara Conservation

## Our approach

Sahara Conservation believes that people working together with shared commitment, skills, knowledge, experience, and resources can effectively conserve diverse, stable, and productive Saharan ecosystems.

For this reason, Sahara Conservation will increase partnerships with actors having complementary expertise to strengthen the impact of its programs. Beneficial partnerships can enhance both local and Sahara Conservation's own capacity and offer opportunities for more integrated responses, sustainable program and conservation approaches.

Partnerships will also be a key tool to support implementation of this strategy, including in the areas of improved wildlife monitoring, applied technology and innovation, captive breeding, translocation, threatened species reintroduction and reinforcement initiatives, as well as improved protected area management. This will include partners in the private sector, other nongovernmental organizations, UN agencies, government institutions, and the research community.

To achieve our conservation goals will require a scaling-up of skills, knowledge, and information within the Sahara Conservation team as well as in its research partners. We will continue to support and promote the acquisition of a diversity of skills to face the rapid increase in the number and extent of global environmental problems, but particularly at the regional scale.

## Championing conservation and collaboration in the Sahel and Sahara region

Sahara Conservation is a legally constituted non-profit, incorporated in the USA in 2007 (as Sahara Conservation Fund) and in France in 2016 (as Sahara Conservation Fund – Europe). Sahara Conservation has a permanent presence and field infrastructure in Niger (registered in 2008) and Chad (registered in 2015), as well as several cooperative agreements with other countries in the region.

For more than 20 years, Sahara Conservation's founders have relentlessly raised the alert about the plight of the Sahel and Sahara wildlife and its critical habitats, with international organizations, including the UN Convention on Migratory Species, CITES, the European Union, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The reintroduction of scimitar-horned oryx and addax in Chad was possible due to strong, long-term collaboration between the Environmental Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD), the Government of Chad, and Sahara Conservation, as well as the Zoological Society of London and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and has garnered significant international attention.

Thanks to these efforts, the region is now firmly part of international conservation objectives and funding, such as the European Union's Africa conservation strategy.

The "Sahel and Sahara Interest Group" (SSIG), at the heart of Sahara Conservation's origins, provides a unique platform for a growing international community of conservation experts to share knowledge and foster collaboration aimed at conserving the Sahel and Sahara's biodiversity. Sahara Conservation has played the central role mobilizing and connecting this community as a core part of its efforts for over a decade.

# Key achievements to date

After almost two decades of progressive growth and evolution, Sahara Conservation has achieved significant conservation impact, delivering on its founding goal: to halt and reverse the decline of the wildlife of the Sahel and Sahara.

Sahara Conservation's efforts have contributed to increased global awareness, interest, and investment in the region's critically endangered wildlife, through direct actions, regional surveys, publications and reports, and by regularly bringing together crucial stakeholders.

Over the last 20 years Sahara Conservation has:

#1



**Reintroduced both the scimitar-horned oryx and the addax back to the wild in Chad, in collaboration with the Government of Chad and the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi. From being extinct in the wild, in 2022 there are over 500 oryx roaming free in the rangelands of central Chad.**

#2



**Worked to restore the West African giraffe, in collaboration with Giraffe Conservation Foundation, through a translocation operation that moved eight giraffes from Niger's Kouré region to the Gadabeggi Biosphere Reserve, more than 800 kilometers away.**



#3



Launched an ambitious program to breed and restore the locally extinct North African ostrich in Niger.

#4

Implemented a rescue mission of the Manga dama gazelle population in western Chad and developed a captive breeding program for these animals in Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim Game Reserve to ensure that these critically important genetics are incorporated into the gene pool.

#5

Developed a management approach adapted to Chad's Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim Game Reserve, designed to sustain this landscape as one of the region's most important wildlife areas and examples of protected area management.

#6

Played a key role in establishing one of Africa's largest protected areas in Niger: the Termit and Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve (97,000 km<sup>2</sup>).

#7

Undertook more than 30 healthcare missions in partnership with Éducation et Santé sans Frontière (ESAFRO) and L'Afrique à cœur, benefiting over 11,100 people living in some of the remotest areas in Africa.



#8

Completed the first ever "Pan-Sahara" wildlife survey in 2009–2011 to identify key conservation sites for priority actions in the region.

#9

Convened the annual meeting of the Sahel and Sahara Interest Group (SSIG) for almost two decades.

#10

Collected and disseminated thousands of geo-referenced records of birds and mammals of the Sahel and Sahara for use by governments, scientists, and conservationists worldwide.

#11



Published the biannual Sandscript magazine since 2007, providing important insights on conservation progress in the Sahara and in the Sahel from field conservationists.

# Our 2025 strategic plan

## Vision

**A Sahara where ecological processes function naturally, with plants and animals existing in healthy numbers across their historical range, benefiting all its inhabitants, and where support for its conservation comes from stakeholders across all sectors of society.**

## Mission

**To conserve the wildlife, habitats, and other natural resources of the Sahara and its bordering Sahelian grasslands to the benefit of all people and wildlife.**

Our strategy will build on the achievements to date and the opportunities they provide for improved conservation of our focal species: scimitar-horned oryx, addax, dama and other desert gazelles, North African ostrich, and other threatened African avifauna, particularly vultures.

To structure the work, Sahara Conservation's strategy is aligned along the following complementary axes.

## Championing Saharan biodiversity

Together with a coalition of partners, Sahara Conservation will advocate, raise awareness, and promote biodiversity conservation and values at all levels of society. In addition, Sahara Conservation will provide expert technical input and advice on conservation efforts targeting the landscapes and species of the Sahel and Sahara, undertaken by partner organizations.

## Landscape conservation

Deserts with highly variable rainfall and extreme seasonality are relatively low productivity ecosystems that support low densities of uniquely adapted species. As a result, these species require considerable

space to support them throughout the course of the year. This requires conservation efforts to take a broader landscape approach to achieve conservation goals.

To this end, Sahara Conservation will contribute to the effective management of protected areas and outstanding landscapes ensuring that wildlife populations thrive, and people tangibly benefit from improved management. The work will be focused on developing a model of cooperative management of protected areas and pastoral ecosystems, integrative planning and implementation, and promotion of the One Health approach, including humanitarian assistance to pastoralists and populations in remote areas.

## Species conservation

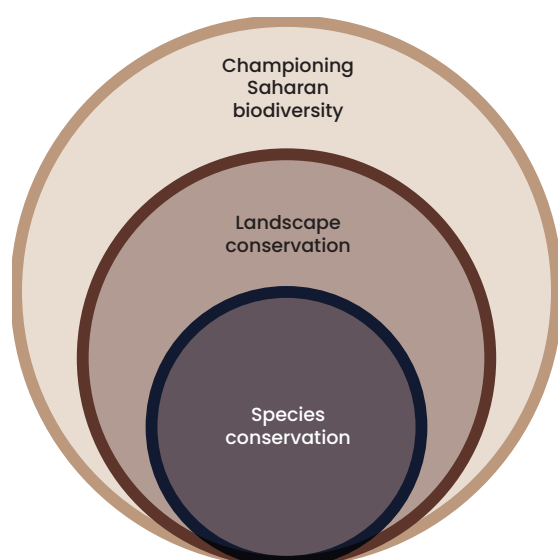
Sahara Conservation's long-term goal is to halt and reverse the decline of the wildlife in Sahel and Sahara and the habitats required for them to thrive.

To achieve the long-term conservation of these threatened, iconic species, Sahara Conservation works with its scientific and technical partners to implement relevant conservation actions including species reintroduction and reinforcement. The results of these actions are closely monitored using satellite and field observations.



## Goals and purposes

Over the coming years, Sahara Conservation will maintain its focus on the conservation of threatened species, increasing emphasis on the need for scaled-up, landscape-level approaches that integrate wildlife conservation with the realities of human development and climate change in the vulnerable region of the Sahel and Sahara. This will be achieved through working on three interrelated axes:



### 1. Championing Saharan biodiversity

#### GOAL

**Convene and inspire the Sahel and Sahara conservation community at the highest-levels, mobilizing support and resources needed for empowering local actors and delivering impact on the ground.**

- Mobilize partners, donors, and decision makers to deliver effective protection of threatened species and sites within the states within the region in ways that benefits local populations and mitigates the impacts of climate change.
- Raise awareness of the importance of the Sahel and Sahara region and threats faced by natural resources through mainstream media, publications, social media campaigns, and communication materials.
- Collaborate with relevant partner organizations, especially other key regional conservation NGOs, such as African Parks Network and Noé Conservation, to promote the long-term conservation of the Sahel and Sahara region.
- Data, information, and lessons learned from the scientific endeavors will be aggregated and published.

#### Sahel and Sahara Interest Group

Continue to convene the Sahel and Sahara Interest Group (SSIG) to advise how best to address urgent conservation issues across the Sahel and Sahara region. SSIG plays a unique role as a forum for people to meet, network, share information and build strong partnerships for the Sahel and Sahara conservation.

## 2. Landscape conservation

### GOAL

**Contribute to the effective management of protected areas and vital landscapes for the species of the Sahel and the Sahara, ensuring that wildlife populations thrive, and people tangibly benefit from improved management.**

#### **Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim Game Reserve, Chad**

The vast 77,950 km<sup>2</sup> OROAGR is the focal site of Sahara Conservation's landscape and species conservation activities. Since its creation in 1969 OROAGR has been a vital natural resource for wildlife and pastoralists alike, providing much needed grazing for nomadic peoples, in Chad and beyond.

In line with the management plan for the OROAGR, develop a core protected area dedicated for wildlife and initiate effective and adapted management of the reserve in conjunction with the provincial government and pastoral peoples.

#### **Gadabeji Biosphere Reserve, Niger**

- Develop and implement innovative species monitoring protocols for West African giraffe, vultures, gazelles, and reintroduced North African ostrich.
- Implement a multi-species reintroduction program for the reserve.
- Support local communities around the reserve to improve conditions (education, health).

#### **Conservation of priority sites across the Sahel and Sahara region**

For conservation to be effective, and considering the financial resources available, activities need to be focused on key areas. The need to identify and prioritize sites for conservation investment has become widely recognized and resulted in the development of the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) approach that compiles available data on all taxa of fauna and flora to select sites. In line with this approach, Sahara Conservation has undertaken the following:

- the Pan-Sahara Wildlife Survey in 2009–2011 encompassing Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia, undertook an initial assessment of the priority sites,
- Sahara Conservation collaborated with the KBA Secretariat in an initial scoping of KBAs in the Sahel and Sahara region, that identified 299,376 km<sup>2</sup> across the region as potential KBAs,
- Sahara Conservation will partner with the KBA Secretariat to provide additional data and refine these priority sites and species further.

#### **Humanitarian assistance**

- Carry out humanitarian assistance providing health and dental, primary care to 2,500 pastoralists and remote populations in Niger.
- Replicate humanitarian missions in Chad, providing primary health and dental care to 1,500 people in and around OROAGR.





### 3. Species conservation

#### GOAL

**Achieve long-term conservation of threatened Sahel and Sahara species through *in-situ* conservation, reintroduction, reinforcement, research, and monitoring.**

#### Scimitar-horned Oryx

- By 2025, establish a minimum of three viable, free-living populations of scimitar-horned oryx, totaling 1,000 breeding animals in three locations including in the OROAGR (Chad).
- Contribute to the status review of the species to downlist the scimitar-horned oryx from Extinct in the Wild on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- Research and document the interface of diseases between wildlife and livestock as part of a One Health approach, to enhance survivorship levels on reintroduced scimitar-horned oryx and addax, and to inform vaccination programs for both people and livestock.

#### Addax

- Continue the program to reintroduce addax in OROAGR until a population of a minimum of 275 free-ranging, breeding individuals is achieved in at least two locations (OROAGR and another location).
- Assist the government of Niger to avoid the extinction of the last remaining addax in the wild.
- Assist the government of Morocco with research and monitoring of reintroduced addax.

#### North African Ostrich

- Establish a wild population of a minimum of 50 individuals released into the OROAGR by 2025.
- Advance captive breeding, artificial incubation, and husbandry of North African ostrich eggs and chicks at Sahara Conservation managed facilities in Niger.

#### Desert gazelles: dama gazelle, dorcas gazelle, slender-horned gazelle

- Monitoring activities of the populations of desert gazelles continued in OROAGR, Chad.
- Secure and reinforce the dama gazelle population in the OROAGR in Chad to reach a minimum of 100 individuals.
- Establish an *in-situ* captive breeding population of dama gazelles in OROAGR to reinforce the wild population.
- Improve the protection and maintain the camera trap program for dama gazelles in the Aïr Mountains, Niger.
- Mobilize key stakeholders to protect the last wild slender-horned gazelles in Algeria and Tunisia and determine their current situation in the wild.





### Threatened African Avifauna

Sahara Conservation will focus its conservation activities on threatened species of African vultures including:

- Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
- Hooded vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*)
- Lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*)
- Rüppell's vulture (*Gyps rueppelli*)
- White-backed vulture (*Gyps africanus*)
- White-headed vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*)

and bustards:

- Arabian bustard (*Ardeotis arabs*)
- Denham's bustard (*Neotis denhami*)
- Nubian bustard (*Neotis nuba*)
- Contribute to international efforts to significantly reduce the illegal trade of vulture parts used in belief-based practices in line with the Convention on Migratory Species Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures.
- Improve knowledge on vulture ecology and threats in the region through appropriate monitoring.
- Enhance protection of important breeding and roosting sites for vultures in Niger and in Chad.
- Raise awareness about main threats to vultures at different levels in the region and ensure positive perception of vultures.
- Strengthen capacities at local and national levels and develop a network of actors contributing to the conservation of vultures in the region.
- Expand monitoring and research activities of the three bustard species.

### West African Giraffe

- Increase the population of West African giraffe from eight to over 20 individuals in the Gadabeggi Biosphere Reserve, Niger through a combination of translocation and reproduction.
- In collaboration with the Nigerien government and partners, develop and implement new census methodology.







# Institutional development

## Scientific research and ecological monitoring

All Sahara Conservation's field activities are underpinned by the highest level of scientific rigor. This applies at all levels, from monitoring the movements of individually reintroduced animals by satellite, to broader ecological monitoring of landscapes, species and threats, and monitoring of priority species at a population scale. There is also a vital need to ensure the genetic diversity and health of the animal populations under Sahara Conservation's guardianship.

This integrated and comprehensive approach is accomplished through partnerships with leading institutions, including EAD, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Saint Louis Zoo, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, University of Edinburgh, ZSL, as well as expert groups such as the IUCN/Species Survival Commission Antelope Specialist Group, and other partners. Sahara Conservation facilitates collaboration between multiple organizations to ensure the highest level of technical input and advice to ensuring the long-term conservation of these highly threatened species and landscapes ensuring key inputs during critically important times.

## Governance

Sahara Conservation and its affiliate Sahara Conservation-Europe are legally constituted nongovernmental, not-for-profit nature conservation organizations. Sahara Conservation was incorporated (as Sahara Conservation Fund) in 2007 as a not-for-profit in the State of Missouri (USA) and has US Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) status tax ID #: 26-0171939. Sahara Conservation-Europe was constituted in 2016 (Sahara Conservation Fund-Europe) under the French 1901 Associations Law. Our representations in Niger and Chad are also registered in these countries with authorization to carry out conservation activities.

## Board of Directors

Sahara Conservation is governed by a Board of Directors tasked with setting strategic direction, overseeing financial stability, ensuring well-being, and guiding Sahara Conservation's management. The Board is made up of a diverse and international group of professionals from leading organizations of the conservation world, zoo community and academia.

## Operational governance

An executive team, based near Paris (France), works alongside Sahara Conservation's governance body as well as in-country teams across our focal countries. Sahara Conservation's management is represented by the CEO, who oversees the development strategy, the global operational follow-up and representation.

## Human resources

Sahara Conservation is committed to recruiting and training the most promising individuals to meet the demands of its ambitious goals and objectives. Our priority will be to reinforce the capacity of our national team members, mentoring up and coming scientists and staff from our institutional partners. We will ensure that the institution as a whole has in place all the policies and safeguards to meet the financial, audit and procurement demands of our donors.

## Sahara Conservation's in-country teams

Sahara Conservation's teams work in some of the most challenging regions with respect to security and poverty. On a day-to-day basis, around 60 team members in Chad and Niger are committed to leading efforts in partnership with national wildlife authorities and local and international stakeholders.

Each of Sahara Conservation's in-country teams combines national and international expertise, technicians and managers, field teams and operational coordination offices, including women and men, who work together to ensure the impact, continuity, effectiveness, and relevance of our projects in the field.

## Communications

***“Saving our planet is now a communications challenge.”***

**Sir David Attenborough**

Sahara Conservation's conservation endeavors have significantly raised awareness of the Sahel and Sahara region, the threats faced and provided positive news from a beleaguered region. To achieve this, a dynamic and effective communications strategy promoting Sahara Conservation's achievements and ambitions in the field at national, regional, and international levels is essential. This will also attract more support to the organization.

Under the 2025 strategic plan the communications strategy will strive to:

- support Sahara Conservation's mission by increasing the organization's visibility,
- facilitate and accompany fundraising and the management of donor relationships,
- advance Sahara Conservation's mission by raising awareness of the causes of wildlife decline in the Sahel and Sahara.

With respect to the communications strategy, this should focus on three overarching goals:

- improve Sahara Conservation's visibility by building a community of supporters in France and more broadly in Europe (general public),
- increase Sahara Conservation's marketing through targeting new or existing donors in the US and France (marketing and fundraising),
- support field teams with their communication needs locally or at the project level and improve coordination with them (internal communications).

To improve Sahara Conservation's digital visibility especially in Europe, Sahara Conservation needs to:

- rebrand and improve web site functionalities and performance,
- add a 'blog' space on the website to publish increasing diverse contents including articles, short videos, infographic that can be shared on the social media,
- diversify Sahara Conservation's channels and content marketing through social media networks (Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter),
- create and animate a community of followers,
- develop yearly campaigns based upon telling specific stories that can be shared to reach a wide audience. The success of each campaign will be measured through SMART objectives.

## Funding

From its founding in 2004 Sahara Conservation has received generous support for its conservation endeavors from the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi, the Convention of Migratory Species, UNEP, IUCN, the European Union, and more recently the World Bank, as well as consistent support from Saint Louis Zoo, Acacia Partners, Al Ain Zoo, Segré Foundation, Addax and Oryx Foundation and individual donors. This support from numerous partners, especially zoological associations in Australia, Europe and the United States has grown to approximately US\$2 million annually.

The bold objectives deriving from the Vision and Mission will require additional support for the organization. Sahara Conservation will pursue funding opportunities from both bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations, zoos, and individuals to reach an annual turnover of US \$4,5 million. This will allow Sahara Conservation to protect key landscapes and the biodiversity supported as well as respond to emerging threats and priorities, from a secure base of excellence in administration and financial management.

In addition, Sahara Conservation will launch a communications and marketing campaign using available social media networks with targeted approaches on relevant communications platforms. Such a contemporary approach will both raise awareness of the Sahara as a 'conservation orphan' while bringing in further resources.

# The way forward

The United Nations declared the years from 2021 to 2030 as the decade of Ecosystem Restoration: a rallying call for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world, for the benefit of people and nature. Healthy ecosystems enhance people's livelihoods, counteract climate change, and stop the collapse of biodiversity.

Sahara Conservation's actions are the epitome of ecosystem restoration for the Sahel and Sahara. By highlighting the importance of these habitats, their biodiversity, and benefits to human wellbeing, Sahara Conservation will promote the need to protect and restore key desert areas. Placing these areas under improved management and working with our key partners, and with national authorities to enforce the law will allow these areas to exist long-term. Ultimately, this approach will enable the iconic desert species that are being reintroduced and protected to thrive, restoring the natural balance.

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## Photos credits

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